

Lord Byron's defence in the matter
of the Stowe scandal

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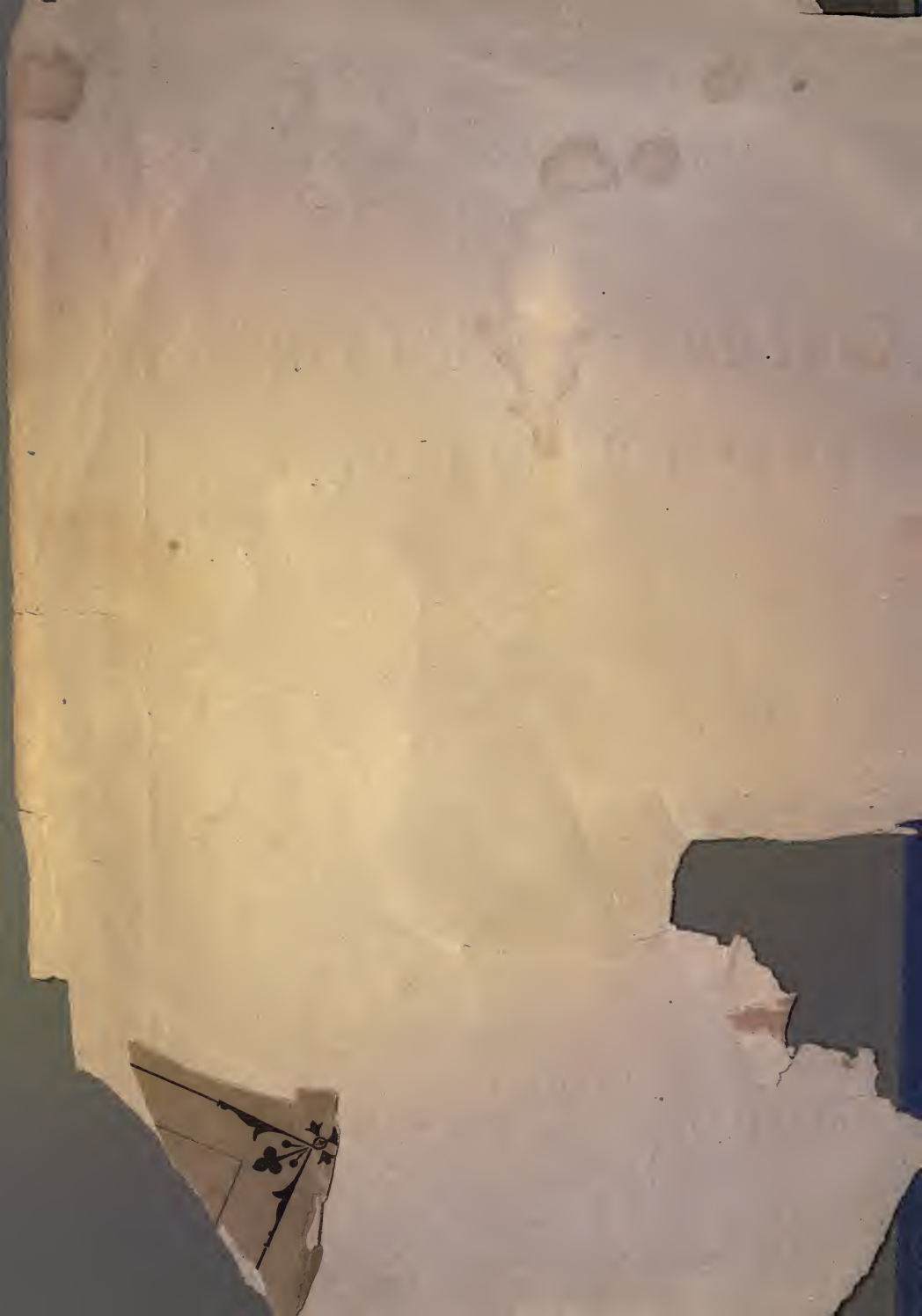
LORD BYRON'S DEFENCE.



"CREDE BYRON."

LONDON:
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LORD BYRON'S DEFENCE.

“I know no justification, at any distance of time, for calumniating an historical character; surely truth belongs to the dead, and to the unfortunate.”—*Preface to MARINO FALIERO.*

I.

O WOMAN, woman, in our hours of ease,
As Scott has sung in namby-pamby verses,
You do your little all to try and tease,
And gain thereby our heartiest, soundest curses;
When pain and sickness come, you pet and please,
And soothe our souls, I don't know which the
worse is;
I only know how badly you behave
When spitting spiteful venom o'er the grave.

II.

Who is this Mrs. Stowe? her name, thank God,
Was never one familiar to my ear;
Her country was a land I never trod,
Although I travelled often far and near.
They say that she's a woman, that is odd—
To women, as a rule, my verse is dear.
Perchance she's some forlorn, neglected beauty,
Or else—her husband doesn't do his duty.

III.

I can't console her in the flesh, I can't
Revisit "glimpses of the moon" to make
Poor Mr. Stowe unhappy; and I sha'n't
Leave good men in these Shades for woman's sake;
So Stowe may rest in peace. I only want
To know why all this trouble she should take.
I might have needed once a moral teacher;
N'importe—but damn this sanctimonious Beecher!

IV.

They say she comes from Puritanic sect,
A strait-laced crew that gentlemen disdain,
Self-righteous and most damnable stiffneck'd,
Like Cowley's Holy Sister. It is plain,
Only the Beecher morals are correct;
And yet in this strange story she is fain
To make the "auri sacra fames" be
The "sacra fames"—of obscenity.

V.

I never was a moral man, I know,—
I did some things were far beyond defending;
For Virtue always was so cursèd slow,
I flew to Vice, just as my soul was mending,
And I am rightly punished: Mrs. Stowe,
Sensation and obscenity so blending,
Has scatter'd lies with dirty prodigality,
And made me blacker even than reality.

VI.

If you throw dirt enough some dirt must cling,
 And this poor sland'rer has thrown *quantum suff*:
 A woman's avarice is an awful thing,
 When she makes more by slander than by puff.
 We know how feathers from the peacock's wing
 The jackdaws stole—a foolish trick enough:
 Thank heaven the loss of feathers doesn't hurt,
 But Stowe's contrived to cover mine with dirt.

VII.

"Fatalis incestusque iudex" she
 As Horace says,* (I ought to change the gender,)
 "Et mulier peregrina" that to me
 A comfort is. My fame needs no defender,
 E'en in America, I think they'll see
 The falsehoods uttered by this base pretender,
 Who's heap'd upon me such a huge indignity,
 With fatuous, foolish, feminine malignity.

* Horace, Lib. iii., Car. iii. 19.

VIII.

Sweet to the blushing bride a husband's kiss,
Sweet to the old man dreams of youthful vigour,
Sweet to the virgin thoughts of love's new bliss,
Sweet is the hope of freedom to the nigger.
But sweeter far in spite of public hiss
To H. B. S. the cheque—a handsome figure
Her publisher will pay—game worth the candle,
For sheets befoul'd with literary scandal.

IX.

O woman! if by any sad mischance
You have to judge another, with what malice
You do the work; Queen Eleanor's stern glance
Was harder to poor Rosamund than the chalice.
You look upon sweet sinners eyes askance :
No matron would forgive th' ingenuous. Alice
In Bulwer's story, who with smiles so winning
Confest she rather liked a state of sinning.

X.

My Sister! thy sweet soul has pass'd away
Where all this foul aspersion hurts thee not;
Pure in the pure realms of eternal day,
Thy heart is free from every earthly spot.
Of no avail the words that sland'ers say,
The fair escutcheon of thy fame to blot.
Curs'd be the greedy publishers who gave
This literary jackal to thy grave.

XI.

By all the memories of our guileless love,
By that fair child who bore thine honour'd name,
I charge thee, if the dead can speak, to prove
The wilful falsehood of this tale of shame!
Full well this ghoul knows that no lie can move
The dead to any word of praise or blame;
Thy sweet soul sleeps, and while the worlds endure
The prurient always will traduce the pure.

XII.

I care not for myself, my fame is far
Beyond this dull reviler's power to dim ;
My Sister shone before her as a star
Shines purely o'er the young moon's crescent rim.
She wish'd our reputations both to tar
With the same foul brush ; 'twas a worthy whim
Of her who white-wash'd hosts of fetid niggers,
To take such pains to blacken both our figures.

XIII.

My Wife had faults enough ; but this I know,
She never would have trusted such a story
To one whose sense of honour was so low,
That she would use it thus to gain the glory,
The dubious fame a lewd world will bestow
On her who opens out an ancient sore. I
Take leave to doubt this confidence auricular,
In every painful, prurient particular.

XIV.

Why did Tom Moore destroy the words I left :

I'd told *my* story plainly in my Journal ;
Of home, of wife, and of my child bereft,
I suffered sorrow and despair eternal.
And now across the strange sad warp and weft
Of my wild life, with subtlety infernal,
Is sent this blackest thread of sin and shame
To damn for ever and to blast my name.

XV.

My Wife, 'tis well known, had hallucinations,
And what she thought of me I scarce can tell ;
I daresay that I caused her great vexations,—
Perhaps I didn't treat her quite as well
As husbands should whatever be their stations.
Marriage is sometimes like rehearsing hell ;
But this I know, she ne'er was so demented
To tell this tale which Stowe must have invented.

XVI.

Thank Heaven ! 'tis not from English hands the blow
Has come that makes me worse than any devil ;
Will Massachusetts boast of Mrs. Stowe ?

Who's tried to bring me down to such a level,
That those who dared to love me now may know,
(Though they forgave wine, womankind, and revel,)
There's one thing that must raise their virtuous
dander,
That is, if they believe salacious slander.

XVII.

'Tis said I woke one memorable morn
And found that I was famous ; speedily
I knew myself the target for all scorn.
Men called me infamous ; (the Lord knows why.)
What laurels this rude woman may have worn
I know not, but this deed of infamy,
This lewd, loquacious, literary antic,
Should blast them on both sides of the Atlantic.

XVIII.

Anacreon Moore, whose pretty lines we've read,
About the Dismal Swamp, that great morass,
Speaks of a youth who lost his heart and head
For love, and thereby proved he was an ass.
In one of the Stowe's stories (is it "Dred"?)

Her foul canoe she paddles there;* she'll pass
Henceforth 'mong men in city, field, or camp,
The "damn'd Witch Sycorax" of the Dismal Swamp.

XIX.

I had an ancestor, he roam'd the ocean,
And plunder from far lands no doubt brought back,
And he'd such luck, the sailors had a notion
He found bad weather upon every tack:
And so they dubb'd him, from the sea's commotion,
"Rough-weather," with his Christian name of
"Jack."

He never found, as I have (storm to thicken),
In Stowe, so strange a Mother Carey's Chicken.

* *Vide* MOORE'S Poem, *passim*.

XX.

O Caledonia, by wild breezes fann'd,
I've loved thy moorland stretching mile on mile,
Where once Queen Mary ruled with graceful hand,
Where men still bless the great Duke of Argyle.
My Murray, thou wert Scotch; now from the land
A Scot has come my blazon to defile.
I pilloried many a Scot with "paltry Pillans,"—
So won't waste shot and powder on *Macmillans*.

XXI.

One would live on for ever, but a bore
One's life becomes ere many years roll on;
And yet a man must feel a little sore
To think how he will suffer when he's gone.
"Nil nisi bonum," said the men of yore,
"De mortuis," but now one's tomb upon
Folks write foul words; in fact, there's no denying
There's something very dangerous in dying.

XXII.

Enough. I leave to all men's scorn the lie
This insult to the living and the dead ;
'Twas a proud task for woman's hands to try
To heap defilement on a woman's head.
The Stowe had scarcely dared to prate, had I
Been living, but where'er her words are read
Deep execrations must her name environ
Who dares to meddle with me.

" Crede

BYRON."

HADES, MDCCCLXIX.



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